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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses both short- and long-term strategies for creating a multicultural educational environment in institutions of higher education. It is based on the current struggle to enhance diversity at St. John's University, a small, liberal arts college in Minnesota. Diversity involves creating a climate where cultural differences are viewed as enriching rather than as problematic, and education becomes multi-cultural when the study of many cultures is the norm rather than the exception. The value of hiring a diverse faculty to act as role models for majority and minority students is stressed as is the development of a diverse curriculum beyond western civilization, maintaining student organizations that are diverse in membership, and making certain faculty, staff, and administration are culturally aware and sensitive. The following short- and long-term strategies are urged for creating such an environment: (1) encourage faculty to individually reconstruct their courses to include content from various cultural perspectives; (2) establish a minority affairs office; (3) commit a percentage of the school's budget to multicultural efforts; (4) regularly sponsor multicultural speakers and events; and (5) develop recruiting practices that aim at acquiring representatives of a variety of populations. (GLR)

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RECRUITING IS ONLY THE BEGINNING: Strategies for Retaining Diverse Students on the Small, Liberal Arts Campus

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"Diversity" is fast becoming the buzzword for the 1990s. It is encouraging that an increasing number of institutions are expressing concern about diversity issues, but that expressed concern does not translate into a multi-cultural reality unless it is followed by concrete actions and long-term strategic planning. Paying lip service to the concept of diversity does nothing for an institution. It is unfair and unethical to promote any organization as committed to diversity in the recruitment process and then bitterly disappoint students and faculty once they have arrived.

Part of any institution's challenge in enhancing diversity is first of all knowing what diversity means and, second, taking specific steps to change the organization. This paper is based on the current struggle to enhance diversity at St. John's University. Like many other small, liberal arts colleges, St. John's has a fairly homogeneous culture. In other words, we have our work cut out for us.

First, diversity involves far more than simply recruiting minority, international, physically challenged, and non-traditional students. Any institution can "buy" diverse students with special scholarships and financial aid scholarships. The difficulty is in <u>retaining</u> those students once they arrive. And once an institution gets a reputation for being culturally cold, even recruitment becomes difficult.

Diversity involves creating a climate which welcomes, embraces, and celebrates heterogeneity--where cultural differences are viewed as enriching rather than as problematic. Education becomes multi-cultural when the study of many cultures is the norm rather than the exception. Creating such a climate does necessitate bringing in a diverse student population, but it also necessitates hiring a diverse faculty to act as role models for majority and minority students. This process goes beyond simple body counts. Is the curriculum diverse, or is the emphasis overwhelmingly on western civilization? Are student organizations diverse in membership and focus? Do culturally different students live together, or is their only contact in the classroom? Are students, faculty, staff, and administration trained in cultural awareness and sensitivity?

Each academic institution, large or small, needs to assess its strengths and weaknesses concerning diversity issues, determine its ideal level of diversity, and then set specific, time-constrained goals to achieve that ideal level. The following strategies are suggested ways to both assess diversity needs and achieve specific goals.

Short-term Strategies

1. **Recruitment** must be: (a) aimed at a variety of populations, and (b) include "critical mass" as a goal. Simply targeting international students from one city in one country is inadequate. A variety of cultures <u>and</u> subcultures should be

represented in the academic community (this applies to faculty and staff as well). It is also inadequate to persuade a handful of diverse students to attend an institution and then expect those few students to constitute diversity in the university. Any group of people who are far and away the minority in a situation will cling to one another for support and shy away from interacting with those who are not like them. Achieving a "critical mass" can reduce this problem.

Recruitment strategies also need to fit their audience. Discover what it is that a particular student subculture most needs and is looking for in a liberal arts college and then address those needs. What can your college honestly do for these students? What are its limitations? (This is a good way to discover goals for the institution.) Do not assume that all potential students want or need to hear the same information.

2. **Apply for grants** which fund diversity efforts. Such funds enable an institution to initiate diversity efforts while providing some "pad" time to integrate the long-term cost of diversity into the annual budget.

3. **Begin student, teacher, staff, administration training to increase cultural awareness and sensitivity.** Workshops focusing on specific aspects of cultural diversity should be regularly offered, but incorporating diversity into established training programs is also necessary. For example, freshman orientation, dorm resident advisor training, faculty workshops on the curriculum, and staff training are all golden opportunities to foster positive attitudes and actions toward diversity.

   Workshops facilitated by trained professionals can also serve to guide institutions toward a long-range plan for diversity (see appendix).

4. Establish a **Minority Affairs Office** or some such equivalent. There must be a central person and place for diversity concerns to gravitate toward. Not only does promoting diversity require the full-time energy and commitment of at least one person, such an effort deserves to be coordinated by a person trained for such a task. Administrators, staff, and faculty will be overwhelmed and unable to effectively promote diversity in the university if they are expected to create and maintain diversity initiatives in their "spare" time. Diversity issues require and deserve the stability a Minority Affairs Office can provide.

5. **Encourage faculty to individually reconstruct their courses** to include content from various cultural perspectives. It takes considerable time to alter the western bias in any course, but many faculty are eager and willing to do so given the time and resources. A rotation of teaching load reductions specifically for this purpose and internal grant

money for revising courses and developing new globally-oriented courses are two ways to achieve this goal.

Long-term Strategies

1. **Financial Support** is critical. Every academic institution must commit a percentage of its annual budget to scholarship, financial aid money, and multi-cultural programming. Without this type of long-term commitment, even the most ambitious and well-intentioned initiatives will fizzle out. Administrators may complain about the cost of this item, but the cost of not having it in the long-run is much greater.

2. **Hiring practices** must create a diverse faculty and staff through long-term commitment to energetically seek out such individuals. A diverse student body is only part of the equation. A diverse faculty and staff provides roles models for minority and majority students, enriches the curriculum, and better reflects the reality which most students will face when they graduate.

3. **Re-examining general education requirements** in light of cultural bias is a difficult but eventual task for most educational institutions. This should be approached as on ongoing process where changes can be made periodically. Ideally, student should be required to learn multiple cultural perspectives in all academic divisions. This requires not only individual course revision, but a rethinking of what is essential for a person to learn to be considered "educated" in terms of general education requirements. A short-term solution is to require students to take a certain number of globally-oriented courses to graduate, but it is far from a satisfactory long-term solution.

4. **Create interdepartmental globally-oriented majors and minors** from existing courses. Often a massive array of new courses and faculty is not necessary to achieve this goal. A thorough scrutiny of existing courses may result in some exciting possibilities for students.

5. **Regular sponsoring of multicultural speakers and events.** It is not enough to sponsor black cultural events during Black History month--cultural programming must be consistent and persistent. To do otherwise sends the message that the institution is not interested in other cultures, except when it is politically correct to be interested.

6. **Institutional leadership** must not only give verbal support to cultural diversity, but commitment in deeds and dollars. This is not to say that administrators have sole responsibility for the success of diversity efforts, but these efforts they will surely fail without such support.

The thrust of this paper has been to provide specific strategies for enhancing diversity at any institution, but particularly at a small, liberal arts college. St. John's is in the early stages of moving toward greater diversity. It is a struggle requiring energy, commitment, and new ways of thinking from every level of the university. Every step the small college takes toward greater diversity moves that institution closer to adequately preparing its students for the global village in which they will work and live, and continued academic integrity into the 21st century.

Appendix

1. The initial consultant for St. John's University was Dr. Charles Taylor, publisher and president of Praxis Publications. He has developed a self-evaluation instrument specifically for academic institutions called the Minority Student Services Delivery System. This instrument evaluates 17 program areas, the results of which are used to create an institutional plan. Program areas include pre-collegiate activities, recruitment activities, admissions activities, matriculation activities, orientation activities, the freshman year, financial aid, academic advising, counselor/career placement, learning resource center, faculty involvement, student incentives, social factors, graduation activities, post-graduatdion, alumni activities, and affirmative action efforts.

   Dr. Taylor conducts an informational and training workshop designed to prepare people within the university to administer the evaluation instrument. He can be reached at Praxis Publications, Inc., P.O. Box 9869, Madison, WI, 53715 (608) 244-5633.

2. Another excellent workshop was provided by Mr. Tendaji Ganges, Director of Educational Services and Programs, Northern Illinois University, Williston Hall East, DeKalb, Illinois 60115-2854.